

Infidelity without Excuse;
OR
No Natural Impossibility in Believing.

A
S E R M O N

Preached at the

VISITATION

AT

E P S O M

May 21st. 1735.

By ROBERT EYRE A. M. Rector of *Buckland*
in *Surrey*, Late Fellow of *All-Souls College* in
Oxford.

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To the Reverend the

CLERGY

Of the DEANERIES of

SOUTHWARK and *EWELL*,

(To whom this Discourse was deliver'd;)

AS ALSO

To the Rest of the CLERGY

OF

The County of *Surrey*.

Reverend Sirs,

THE Honour you have done me in appointing me to Represent and Serve you in *Convocation*, is so fresh in my mind, that I cannot deny myself the *Satisfaction* of expressing my *Grateful Resentments* of it on this Publick Occasion. Which I look upon as some sort of *Recompence* for the *real mortification* of appearing in *Print*.

Not that I would be understood to be either *Asbam'd* or *Afraid* of declaring

claring to the world the sense I have of so Fundamental a Point of our Common Christianity as I have here undertaken to vindicate; could I bring myself to entertain an opinion of the *Performance itself* in any degree answerable to that which my Reverend and Candid *Audience* were (I fear) too indulgently pleas'd to Favour it with. But it ought to be presum'd, that it was the *Design*, not the *Merit* of the Composition that engag'd their approbation of it.

However such as it is, it is with *Great Respect* presented to your *Acceptance*; with this farther assurance, that no Proper occasion, how *disagreeable* soever to *myself* in *other* respects, can at any time escape me, of declaring with what Regard

I am

Reverend Sirs

your most obliged

most Affectionate

Brother and Servant

Buckland

June 2^d. 1735.

ROBERT EYRE.

MARK 16. Part of the 16th. v.

— *He that Believeth not shall be damn'd.*

THE Authority of the Books of *Revelation* having been often prov'd beyond all *reasonable Contradiction*, one would Hope that the *Deists* and *Infidels* of the Age (for it is too visible that such there are) should be brought at least to *doubt* of the solidity of their *Scheme*, and of course to lay to Heart *the sad and lasting Consequences* of it in case it should in the end *fail and disappoint* them, which, whatever they may *fondly Hope*, it is impossible for them to *Prove* it will *not*. And sure the bare *Possibility* of this might incline them to consider, before it is too late, whether the *one*, or the *other*, opinion be the more *Safe and Eligible*. This one would reasonably expect from them upon Supposition that the *Probabilities* on each side were *Equal* only. And this indeed they seem in *some measure* to be *sensible* of, and accordingly *Fortifie* themselves against any *danger* that may attend their Infidelity by suggesting that be the issue of the *Dispute* what it will, it is not *possible* they should *Suffer*, much less *without End or measure*, on account of an opinion which it is *not in their Power to Controul*.

This is a way of Reasoning which they seem to be particularly *fond of*, and which therefore, for fear of doing it the least *Injustice*, I shall chuse to give you in their own expresse words. “Faith “(say’s a late Author) consider’d in itself, can “neither be a Virtue, or a Vice; because men “*can* no otherwise Believe, than as things *appear* to them. — And again, “what can be “more *absurd* than to imagine, that God will “shew his *Favour* to one for Believing *what he “could not but Believe*, and his *Displeasure* to another for not Believing *what he could not Believe*?

Now this being a *Principle* on which they seem to *rely* with no common degree of *Assurance*, I shall take the liberty to consider it in what follows, as fully as my Time and the compasse of a Discourse of this Nature will admit. In the farther prosecution of which design, I shall

First, In very few words state the Proposition of my Text; *He that Believeth not shall be damn’d*. And then

Secondly, Endeavour to detect the *Weakness* of that *Pretence* by which our modern Infidels hope, in the last resort, to avoid the *Force* of so strong and solemn a denunciation.

First, Then I am in few words to state the Proposition of my Text: *He that believeth not shall be damn’d*.

Now these words, being in their original of no *doubtful* or *ambiguous* signification, will be best

* See Christianity as old as the Creation. 8vo. p. 44.

understood by looking back to the particular *occasion* of them: than which a more *solemn* or *important* one cannot well be imagin'd. For in the foregoing verse our Blessed Saviour had given Commission to his *Apostles* to go forth and propose his Covenant of Peace, *the glad tidings of salvation* to the world: *Go ye into all the world, and Preach the Gospel to every Creature.* The *Importance* of which errand he proceeds to assure them in the verse of my Text was no less in the *Issue* of it, than the everlasting *Happiness* or *Perdition* of every Person to whom it should be propos'd: *He that Believeth and is Baptiz'd shall be saved; but He that Believeth not shall be damn'd.* Or in other words, (for so our Blessed Lord is *elsewhere* pleas'd to declare himself upon the Point) *"the word that I have spoken, the same shall Judge him in the last day."*

May the *Fine Genius* who disdains to Think in the *common road*, and the *Rigid Infidel* who insists upon the liberty of *disbelieving what he pleases*, be in time *awaken'd* by the awfull monition of so tremendous an *oracle*! --- And that this is no *unreasonable* expectation in the nature of the *Thing* itself, will I hope appear, when I have endeavour'd

Secondly, To detect the *Weakness* of that *Pretence* by which our modern Infidels hope, in the last resort, to avoid the *Force* of so strong and solemn a denunciation.

The *Pretence* then, and which seems to be triumph'd in as a Principle not to be disputed, is clearly this; "that no man can Believe *what*

"he *Pleases*, or any farther than he sees good
 "Grounds for his Belief; and of Consequence He
 "who Believes *not* shall not be liable to *Punish-*
 "*ment* upon that account: forasmuch as no one
 "shall be Punish'd for what he *cannot Help*. This
 I take to be the full force of the Argument;
 which is in truth a most egregious *Fallacy*, as well
 as a bold Attempt upon the common sense and
 understanding of Mankind. It is taking a mean
advantage of common understandings, how fami-
 liar soever in the writings of such men as *by cun-*
ning craftiness lie in wait to deceive, to *disguise* the
 Truth by arguing from a known and *allow'd*
maxim in some *certain limited sense*, but at the
 same time applying it in a *latitude* it was never
 meant in. Which is the very case now before
 us. *That no man shall be Punish'd for what he can-*
not Help, is in some sense not only an *Innocent*
Affertion, but a very *Just* and *Equitable* measure
 of Right Reason; and what therefore no body
 in his *wits* will *deny*. Upon which account it
 is pitch'd upon as a *proper medium* to convey the
 Poyson in this case to *ordinary* understandings,
i. e. (as they well know) to the bulk of Mankind.
 But in the name of Truth, who ever applied this
 maxim to the case of a *voluntary* and *wilful* Inca-
 pacity? A *natural* Incapacity is *one* thing, and
 an Incapacity contracted thro' *Humour* or *Habit*
 is *another*. For whatever necessity may be laid
 upon us by the *latter* is all of our *own growth*, and
 was *voluntary* in it's *beginning*: whereas that Ne-
 cessity which *Excuses* must be founded in *Things*,
 and is therefore *Involuntary*. In the *one* Case,
 what cannot *now* be Help'd, *might* have been
 Help'd

Help'd, what we cannot *now* see, we *might* have seen: whereas in the *other* ev'n *liberty of choice* is excluded, and where there is *no choice*, there will be *no account*. This in *general* --- But in order to unravel any thing that may be suppos'd to *remain* of Intricacy in this Argument, I shall now proceed to resolve it into it's *first Principles*, and consider gradually and distinctly the several *Parts* or *Branches* of which it is compos'd. Which are plainly these two:

I. *That we cannot Believe what we Please*, or any farther than the *Motives of Credibility* induce and warrant us.

II. *That we cannot be answerable to the Justice of God* for not Believing, where *such Motives* are in truth *wanting* to induce our Belief. The

First is, *That we cannot Believe what we Please*, or any farther than the *Motives of Credibility* induce and warrant us.

And this in *General* is certainly *true*: but to make it of any *Consequence* in the *present dispute*, it must be *suppos'd* that the matter presented to our understandings has in all respects receiv'd a *fair and impartial Hearing*; that the *Circumstances of Credibility* have been fully *weigh'd* and *consider'd*; and that no *Passion, Vice, or Prejudice* has been suffer'd to mix in the debate, or to give an undue *Bias* to the mind. And in things of a *divine Consideration* in *particular*, that we have not been unmindful to apply ourselves in a manner becoming our weak and fallible Nature, to *Him* whose *wisdom* is *Infinite*, for *his Conduct and Direction* in our Resolves about them. For otherwise, where *any, or all*, of these pre-
cau-

cautions have by *Negligence* or *Design* been fatally omitted, this boasted Maxim may in *Fact* become so utterly *Revers'd*, that a man shall be brought to Believe nothing *but what he pleases*. This, I presume, is too well understood to be denied by any one. For otherwise it could never happen that the *same Proposition*, grounded upon the *same Motives of Credibility*, should be finally *Affirm'd* and *Denied* by different Persons, their *Capacities of Judging* being suppos'd *Equal*. Which the Gentlemen I have to do with are so well appriz'd of, that *they* can upon *occasion* suppose that *other* Motives than those of *Credibility* may have dispos'd men to adhere to the Scheme of *Revelation*. That, they modestly suggest, is too *Gainful* a delusion to be easily parted with; and the *Passions* and *Interests* of men that *differ* from them are candidly presum'd to influence their Belief. ^a

So that it is on *all* hands allow'd, that the *motives of Credibility* are *not* the *only* inducements that do in *Fact* and *Experience* determine *mens opinions* as to the Truth or Falshood of any Proposition that is presented to them. And I must observe, that tho' *Interest* or self-advantage has indeed too *general* an influence in the world, to be confin'd to any *one Set* or Party of men, it is however *but a single* motive among *many*, that are known to govern and corrupt the Judgment in matters of this nature. Give me leave to insist a little on some of the more *Common* and *Powerful* of them as I go along.

Such are *Prejudice*, *Ease*, *Pride*, *Envy*, *Wilfulness* and *Contention*.

^a Christianity &c. p. 277. 282. 283. &c.

First for Prejudice: And to what Cause but *this*, can we ascribe the Instances we dayly see of mens being totally *Blind* to their *own*, or to the palpable Faults and miscarriages of those they *Love*, whilst they are but *too easily* perswaded of the *like*, tho' but *Imaginary* Blemishes in *others*? And of *all* Prejudices, those which have been at any time taken up in the business of *Religion* have, we know, been ever with the *greatest difficulty* remov'd. Whether the Reproach of being thought *mistaken* in a matter of that serious and *important Concernment*; or of having *too hastily* espous'd those opinions which relate to our only Great and Lasting Interest; or whatever else the *motive* be, the *Fact itself* is visible and notorious: and oftentimes too to *that degree*, that men shall not apprehend the force of the *strongest* Argument *against* their preconceiv'd Principles, when at the same time the merest *Shadow* of a *Pretence* in *favour* of them shall pass for *Demonstration*.

And I cannot help observing upon this To-
pick a very *disingenuous Practice* of which the men
I am at present concern'd with have been too
notoriously Guilty in their late Industrious At-
tacks upon the Christian Revelation; and parti-
cularly with regard to that very argument we
are now considering: namely, that the Argu-
ments they produce, tho' never so *stale*, and ne-
ver so fully *Answer'd* in opposition to *Socinians*,
or *other* enemies of our Faith, are offer'd *anew* to
the world, without any notice taken of the most
Probable *Solutions* that have been given of them,
or so much as owning that they have ever *seen*
or

or *heard* of any thing that can in the least be suppos'd to impeach the credit of them. Which I chuse rather to impute to *Blindness* and *Prejudice* than to downright *Craft* and *Imposture*: and the rather because one manifestly discovers such strong Symptoms of the *same disorder* in other parts of their Performances, especially where the words "*Church, Priest, Establishment*, or the like, happen to occur. In which case they are so far from being able to *dissemble* their Prejudice, that they cannot even *mention* them, I do not say with *Good Manners*, but with *Common Decency*.

Secondly, A love of *Ease* or security in their *Enjoyments* may too possibly influence the *opinions of men* in matters of this nature. And it is little doubted but that it is owing to this tenderness or affection for their *Lusts*, that men have flatter'd themselves in every Age, *some* into a disbelief of *Eternal Torments*; *others* of a *Particular Providence*; and *others*, lastly, even of a *God*.

Nor is it *impossible* that the same indulgent Principle may have led *some* at least of our *modern* Sophists to assert the *Innocency*, as well as *Safety*, of their *Infidelity*: which yet upon the footing of a *Divine Revelation* (the *truth* of which they can never *disprove*) amounts to nothing less, especially if we take in their uncommon *Zeal* to *advance* and *propagate* it, than the daring sin of *Fighting against God*. But alas! as some Philosophers of old, resolving never to be controul'd in their enjoyments, found it necessary to disbelieve a state of *Torments*; so it is but too natu-

ral for such as have once render'd themselves incapable of any *advantage* from *Christianity*, at once to cast off it's doctrines and so rid themselves in some sort of the *Inconveniences* of it too.

Thirdly, Pride is another enemy to the freedom and impartiality of our *Enquiries*; and often leads men to prefer Principles of a *Rare* and *Uncommon* to those of a *Current* and *Establish'd* stamp. *Establish'd* Principles are the things of all the world that *some* among us are most *averse* to; which plainly shews that the *Credibility* of the Thing propos'd is not the *only* motive that has a share in forming their *Belief*. For be an *Establishment* never so *cruel* or *tyrannical* a thing in the *nature* of it, no one will say that the *Doctrine* is the *less Credible* for being *establish'd*.

Pride, or self-conceit, is certainly one of the *blindest* and most *unreasonable* Passions that the mind of man is subject to; and therefore the most *unfit* to mix itself with our *enquiries after Truth*: for which reason the Apostle, speaking of some in *his* days, who were remarkable for nothing more than an extravagant opinion of their own superior *Knowledge* (from whence they took their name) remarks of them that they were *Proud, Knowing nothing*. The *foundation* of which severe *Censure* we have in the words immediately *preceding* it, namely, *their not Consenting to wholesome words, even the words of our Lord Jesus Christ, and to the doctrine which is according to Godliness, but teaching otherwise*.

Fourthly, Envy is another Passion that is too apt to have a share in *forming* and giving an *Edge* to

our *opinions*. It was upon *this* Principle that *Christ himself*, the most generous *Benefactor* to mankind, and the most Perfect *Pattern* of all *Goodness*, was deliver'd to Death as an infamous *Malefactor*. The *Credit* he had with the *People* after the raising of Lazarus from the dead, put the Pharisees upon that desperate Expedient to *rid themselves of him* at all adventures *Perceive ye, say they among themselves, how ye prevail nothing? behold the world is gone after him.* And therefore some other sudden course was to be taken with him. *This* it was which mov'd the Jews of *Antioch*^b to speak against those things which were spoken by Paul, *Contradicting and Blaspheming.* *This* it was which mov'd the unbelieving Jews at *Thessalonica* to raise the City, and set upon the House in which Paul and Silas were, in order to expose them to the *People*, with whom they stood in a good degree of *Reputation*, as enemies of the *Publick Peace*.

And how is it possible indeed that *Envy*, that utter enemy to the *Peace* and repose of the *mind*, should, if once admitted, suffer it to enjoy such a state of *Tranquility* as is necessary to the forming of *Just* and *Generous Sentiments* upon any Subject? Or, how should that which ever *Grieves* and *Repines* at the success of others, entertain a favourable Thought of those Principles which are receiv'd with *approbation* and *applause*, tho' never so *Justly*, by what it calls the deluded and unthinking *Many*?

Fifthly, A *Fifth* Instrument of Error and delusion in the Understanding, is a stubborn or

^a Joh. 12. 17. 18. 19. ^b Acts 13. 45. ^c Acts 17. 5.

pertinacious *wilfulness* in the mind, an obstinate adhering to an *opinion* which it has once, tho' never so *wrongfully* espous'd: a Temper, which stands in direct *opposition* to that *Humility* and *Teachableness* of Spirit which is requir'd in those who come prepar'd as they *ought* to be for the admission of *Truth*. To this it is that our Blessed Lord in the 5th. of *St. John* imputes the Infidelity of those *Jews* to whom he is there addressing himself; for having in the 38th. verse, upbraided them for their Unbelief, and referr'd them in the next words to their *own Scriptures* for a proof of his *Mission*, he adds v. 30th. *ye will not come to me that ye might have Life*. And certain it is in Fact that *wilfulness* or obstinacy in opinion has oftentimes more Influence upon our Belief than *Reason* has. Witness the many *Heresies* that have infested the Church of Christ in all Ages of it; there being no *complete formal* Heresy without it. A *demonstrative* proof (if any thing can be so) that it is no *new* thing at least for *Positiveness* and *Opiniatrety* to usurp the seat and direction of *Reason*. The

Last thing mention'd by which the mind is frequently perverted in it's enquiries after Truth, is a Spirit of *Wrangling* and *Contention*: some of the *Fruits* of which were those *perverse disputings* of which we have frequent complaint in the *Inspired writings*. Where we read of *some* that were *dotting about Questions and Strifes of words*; and of *perverse disputings of men of corrupt minds, destitute of the Truth*; *of Philosophy and vain deceit*; *of Profane and vain babblings, and oppositions of*

a 1 Tim. 6. 4. 5. 20. b Col. 2. 8. 3 Tim. 6. 20. 21.

Science falsely so call'd, which some professing err'd concerning the Faith; and the like.

And if ever the Spirit of vain Philosophy and Deceit was for the Sins of men let loose upon the world, it seems to have been in *this* licentious (or to say all that's Bad in *one word*, as it has of late been us'd amongst us, *Free-thinking*) Age: when ev'ry Article of our Faith is not only *disputed*, but under a pretence of fair disputation, impudently *mock'd*, *ridiculed*, and *vilified* — *I pray God it be not laid to our Charge.*

Having thus far consider'd *some* of the several *motives* that are too apt to *influence* and give a Bias to *mens opinions*, I must *add*, that where these, or such like, Passions have been *long indulg'd*, or *too fondly entertain'd*, it must not be wonder'd at, if *God himself* is pleas'd in the end to *join* in the Delusion, so far at least as to give them up to *Believe* and *Love* the *Lye themselves* have made, and which for that *reason* only they have so *naturally* but *unreasonably* cherish'd.

All which being fairly and impartially consider'd, the Proposition now before us must be own'd to be in a good measure *Qualified*; so that when it is said, *we cannot Believe what we Please*, and any thing's rejected as *Incredible* upon that account, all the necessary *Conditions* of *Judging freely and dispassionately* are suppos'd to have been *observ'd*: whereas for *one* that disbelieves a thing for want of *motives of Credibility* to induce his Assent, it's more than *possible* an *hundred* may be determin'd by *other* considerations. For which reason it seems but necessary to distinguish *in what sense* the *Truth* of the Proposition is to be *admitted*.

Now

Now it is *strictly* and *Philosophically* true of *Belief* in general, that the *Laws of Reasoning* being duly and punctually observ'd, a man cannot but Assent to the truth of a Proposition as far as it appears Credible; and *è contra*. And we must admit that *Faith*, in this sense of it, as it is a *speculative Act of the mind* can neither be a *Virtue* nor a *Vice*, because it is not in our Power to withhold it. But in the *moral* sense of it, as a *Practical Act of the will*, in which sense alone it is entitled to the *Rewards of the Gospel*, (as has been often and well observ'd) it implies such a disposition of mind as inclines us to entertain, whatever upon enquiry we shall find to be *Reveal'd by God*. 'Tis not a bare *Belief*, but a *Belief* founded in a disposition to receive the will of God, as such, a *Believing with all our Heart* that must entitle us to the privileges of the Gospel. Insomuch that were it possible for us to Believe without such a disposition, our *Faith* were vain, we were yet in our sins. It is not enough to satisfy the demands of the Gospel that we obey, but we must obey from the Heart that form of doctrine which was deliver'd to us. Rom. 6. 17.

Let us then no more be told by *Infidels* that it is not in their Power to Believe, (meaning *Belief* in the metaphysical abstracted sense of it;) but let them say, whether it is in their Power to dispose their minds to receive what they shall find to be the will of God, or no. Do they find in themselves an Inclination to be as effectually convinc'd of the Truth of Things upon the bare word and Promise of God, as upon any other the clearest evidence in the world? which seems to be that peculiar frame or temper of mind which they that
are

are accomplish'd with are said in Scripture to be εὐθετοὶ εἰς βασιλείαν ὁ Θεός, *Fit, or Prepar'd, or Dispos'd* for the Kingdom of God: and πεταγμένοι, *Dispos'd*, in a *Readiness* for eternal Life. This is condescending from the heights of *Metaphysics* to *Common Life*; and when they have answer'd this plain Question, we shall soon come to the bottom of this business.

Indeed matters of *Faith*, which are the *Concern* of *all*, ought to be treated of in such a *manner* as to be *understood* of *all*, and to be applicable to the Case of *every* Christian. The most illiterate *Peasant* has a *Soul to be saved*, as well as the most *acute abstracted Reasoner*.

Let them then be so *Just* as to understand *Belief* in the *Moral Evangelical* Sense of it, *not* as a *bare assent of the understanding*, but as it signifies a *good Disposition of mind to receive the will of God*; and then tell us, *Is* such a disposition of mind *in their Power*, or *is it not*? If such a Disposition be in their Power, then is it in their Power to *Believe* in a Gospel Sense; but if such a disposition be *not* in their Power, they are no longer to be treated with as *Rational Agents*, and so no wonder that they neither *do*, nor *can*, *Believe*. If men cannot bring with them a fair *Disposition* to be *Convinc'd* on which side soever the Truth shall appear to lie, it is in vain to talk or Reason with them. An *Angel* from *Heaven*, or even *God himself*, in this case *speaketh into the air*.

But we must expect to be told, that it is *not* for want of an *Honest Disposition* to be *Convinc'd*, that it is not in the Power of these men to *Believe*, but for want of proper motives of *Credibility*
to

to win their *Assent*. But upon the Supposition of the *Divine Inspiration* and *Authority* of the Holy *Scriptures*, which the *Church* of Christ is in *Possession* of, and which they *themselves* will never be able to *disprove*, it is in vain to talk of the *want* of *Evidence* in this matter. Forasmuch as *God* is *Truth*, and our *Understandings* as well as *Wills* owe a *natural Homage* and *Submission* to his *Authority*.

Suppose a man commanded to *Love* God (and I can see no material distinction in *this Case* between the *Love* of God and a *Belief* of him;) should reply, *My Affections are not at my Command, I must Love what I can*: will any one say that such an one is at once *absolved* from all obligations to the *Love* of God?

We who have the *Honour* to minister in Holy things, have been sometimes told, "that a Person we have been concern'd with *cannot Forgive*, "it is not in his *Power* to *Forgive*; he has endeavoured all he *can* to *mollifie his Resentments*, but "all *in vain*; the *Injury* is too keen and affecting to be *Forgotten*, much more to be *Excus'd*. And what does all this amount to, but that his *Lusts* and *Passions* have so far *Possess'd* and got the *Ascendant* over him, that it is not in his *Power* to be a *Christian*? This it must be own'd is a *Pitiable*, but at the same time a very *Dangerous* State, and too certainly proceeds from *strong Passions* and a *weak Faith*.

The Truth is, let a *Proposition* never so *credible*, an *Object* never so *enchanting*, or a *Duty* never so *reasonable*, be propos'd to a man's choice, yet if his *Understanding* be not *Purg'd* from *Prejudice*,
and

and his *Will* from *Perverseness*, he continues *deaf to the voice of the Charmer*, and is equally incapable both of *Conviction* and of *Persuasion*.

But still it will be said, that in *this* way of talking, we take a thing for *Granted* which ought to be *Prov'd*, and which it is impossible *we* should *Know* to be true. If the *Infidelity* of our Adversaries were *really* owing to some lurking *Vice* or *Passion* in the Heart, yet could not *we*, the *Objectors*, See or Know that it *was* so. In answer to which, I would observe, that if things in themselves *equally Incredible* find ready entertainment with these men, *that* amounts to a strong *Presumption* (and *Know* it, it seems, we *cannot*) that some secret Prejudice or Passion lies in the way of the *one*, which has no place or influence in the *other*. What else should give the *preference* to *either* of two things *equally Incredible*? And yet *such Cases* there *are* as many as are the receiv'd *Books of ancient Story*, or as are the yet *undiscover'd wonders of Natural Appearances*. All which are *Believ'd* without any *Hesitation*, whilst *Revelation* alone, tho' not more *Unaccountable* than the *one*, and much *better Attested* than the *other*, is denied the *common credit* of them *both*. And now let *themselves* Judge whether here be not an *appearance* at least of the utmost *Blindness* and *Partiality*.

But however *that* be, we may all be assured, that an unfeign'd *Assent* to *every* thing that is *Revealed* by God, is so *necessary* and *Indispensable* a *duty*, that no *Pretence*, however *plausible*, can in any wise be admitted in *excuse* of the *Neglect* of it. It cannot at *any* rate be allowable in *us*, vain and dependent *Creatures* as we are, to presume to
with-

withdraw our *understandings* from the obedience of *Him*, to whom we owe our very *selves*, and who will content himself only with the service, of the *whole man*; which (according to the *Soci-nians* themselves) consists in a resignation of our *understandings* as well as *wills* and *affections*. And what is this but sound unaffected *Sense* founded on the Law of our *Creation*? For

As for *that* bold Assertion, "that to suppose " God requires us to give up our understandings "to *any*, (it must mean even his *own*, *Authority*) "is to suppose he requires *Impossibilities*^a: it can hardly deserve a serious answer. For nothing amounts to an *Impossibility* whose *Contrary* does not imply a *Contradiction*. But is it a *Contradiction* for a man to Believe his *Reason*, and at the same time to Believe upon *Authority*? Are *Reason* and *Authority* things absolutely *Contradictory* in the nature of them? Is there no such thing conceivable as a *Reasonable Authority*, an Authority founded *in* and agreeable *to* Reason? *One* at least I will venture to Affirm there *is*; I mean, the *infallible* Authority of God *himself*, who can neither *deceive*, nor be *deceiv'd*. And where God himself is the *Reporter* as well as the *Judge*, it is in vain to talk of the want of *motives* to engage our Assent. As will farther appear

Secondly, When we have consider'd the *other* branch of the Argument propos'd to be spoken to, namely, *that we cannot be answerable to the Justice of God* for *not* Believing, where *such motives*, as we have been speaking of, are in truth *wanting* to induce our Belief. For

^a Christianity &c. p. 167.

If by these *motives of Credibility* are meant such as result from the Nature of *the thing to be Believ'd*, the Proposition is entirely *false and groundless*; forasmuch as God may *justly* require our Assent to things *Incredible in themselves* upon the sole credit of his own *veracity*, which we are sure cannot *mislead* us. But if by these *Motives of Credibility* are meant such as relate to the *Testimony* upon which our *Assent* is *requir'd*, the Proposition is *True* indeed, but what no body in his *Senses* will *deny*. No man can believe a thing upon *Testimony* any *farther* than the *Circumstances of Credibility* which attend it induce his Belief. But is it then so *hard* a matter to Believe the testimony which *God himself* is pleas'd to give us concerning his own *Heav'nly* and *Eternal Truths*? Is the *Infallible* testimony of *God himself* no Reason for Believing?

And let not this be call'd a mere *begging of the Question*, a taking a thing for *Granted* which our *Adversaries* upon *their* Principles are obliged to *deny*; since the *Divine Authority of the Books of Scripture* is built upon a foundation which all it's Enemies have never yet, and we trust too never *will* be able to *overthrow*. 'Till *this* be done, it is the highest *arrogance* to set up their *Reason* against the Authority of *Him* from whom they *receiv'd* it, and who has an unalienable Right to the submission of the *whole man*. And this being the Case, I shall without fear of *Reproach* upon that account, proceed to take a short, but distinct, view of this matter from the Books of *Revelation* themselves.

And here it is observable, that the *necessity* of

a *Christian Faith*, in order to *Salvation*, and the *Damnation* of such too as *refuse* to Believe, do not depend upon a *single* Testimony of Scripture only, but are contain'd either *virtually* or *explicitly* in almost *numberless* Authorities of the New Testament. Not only the verse of my *Text* is most exprefs to this purpose, *He that Believeth and is Baptiz'd shall be saved, but he that Believeth not shall be damn'd*; but our Lord in *St. John* assures us that *He that Believeth on Him is not Condemn'd, but he that Believeth not is Condemn'd already, because he has not Believ'd on the name of the only Begotten Son of God.* "So that Mercy to Believers (as a Great Man observes upon the Text) "is the *principal* part of the *Christian Covenant*, all "others being absolutely *excluded*. The same Truth which *John the Baptist* also declares upon a remarkable occasion which we have an account of in the sequel of *that* chapter; *He that Believeth on the Son hath everlasting Life: and he that Believeth not the Son shall not see Life; but the wrath of God abideth on him.* Agreeably to which *St. Peter* speaking to *Cornelius* and those that were with him in the 10th of the *Acts* at the 43^d verse, says, *To Him (i. e. to Christ) give all the Prophets witness, that thro' his Name whosoever Believeth in him shall receive remission of Sins.* And the same Apostle in the 4th chapter of that Book, speaking for himself before the High Priest and the whole Authority of the Jews, tells them that *Jesus Christ of Nazareth, the stone which was set at nought of the chief men, or master-builders amongst them, is become the Head of the Corner.* Nei-

a 3.18. b v.36. c v.10.11.12.

ther (continues he) is there Salvation in any other: for there is none other Name under Heaven given among men whereby we must be saved.

To which last Testimony of St. Peter, the *Author* already hinted at in many parts of this discourse, has no better *Answer* than this most extraordinary *Remark*, namely, "that the Apostle "at *this* time tho' fill'd with the Holy Ghost, "needed a *Miracle* to open his Understanding "to *comprehend* a most evident *Truth* (i. e. at the time of his making this declaration he wanted *Common Sense*, which might have told him what was afterwards *Reveal'd* to him) "namely, *that* "God is no *Respecter of Persons*: but in every *Nation* he that feareth him and worketh *Righteousness* "is accepted with him. p. 260. — As tho' these two *Texts* were at utter *variance* with each other, and the Apostle in this *last* passage had been by miracle *convinc'd* of his *first* mistake in confining Salvation to the Name of *Jesus*. When every body sees that what St. Peter says of *Persons of all Nations being accepted by God*, is meant of their being acquainted *with* and admitted *to* the Privileges of the *Gospel*; not accepted *without*, much less in a state of *opposition* to the *Gospel*. Which is *most evident* not only from ev'ry line of that very *Speech*, to which the words *he* so confidently *relies on* are an *Introduction* only, and particularly from the Text before cited, *To Him give all the Prophets witness* &c.; but also from what follows in the *Conclusion* of that story, that "he commanded those to whom he had been speaking *to be Baptiz'd in the name of the Lord*. But

From *this* shrewd *Remark* it's easy to observe how greatly the world may expect to be *Edified* by these *New Interpreters* of Scripture; and with-all with what *Honour* and *Sincerity* it is that they are treating mankind; when Groundless, and indeed *Blasphemous Banter* is us'd for *Argument*, and an attempt to *impose* upon them in the *grossest* manner is made to pass for *New Light* and sterling *Demonstration*. But to return:

And surely then it is very clear from these *few* Texts of Holy Scripture, (to which many *more* might be added) what the Sense of *Revelation* is in this matter. *Christ* is there represented as the *Chief Corner Stone*, *chosen of God and Precious*; to whom we also coming are as lively stones built up a *Spiritual House*. *Unto them which Believe* he is *precious*; but *unto them which stumble at the word, being disobedient, a stone of stumbling and a Rock of offence*. So that *whosoever shall fall upon this Stone* i. e. fall into *Unbelief* on account of any *discouragements* that may happen to him, *shall be broken*; it shall be a fore *bruise* or *wounding* to his Soul; but on *whomsoever It shall fall, whosoever shall out of Contumacy bring it down in vengeance upon him, it shall grind him to Powder*.

True; but then *this* how *clearly soever Reveal'd*, is one of those *hard Sayings* which we must not expect our *Adversaries* will *digest*, but will rather by *them* be turn'd to the *Prejudice* of *this* part at least of the *Revelation itself*; since, as they will peremptorily insist, *Men can never be Punish'd for what they could not avoid*. And by the help of *this* way of Reasoning, how *safe* and *harmless* a

a 1 Pet. 2.4—8. b Hammond on Matt. 21.44.

thing is *Infidelity* become? *Believe* they cannot, and what cannot be *Help'd* shall not be *Punish'd*. But

By the *same rules* of *Construction* one may undertake to prove that the greatest *villanies* that were ever acted in the world, were but *innocent Amusements* only; it being no *new* thing for men to, *Sin* themselves into a *necessity* of *Sinning*, 'till God himself *gives them up to vile affections and a reprobate mind*. Were the *Jews*, I would ask, the *safer* from *Punishment* because they *could* not see the force of our *Blessed Saviour's Doctrine* and *Miracles*? Or, did the *Noble Samaritan* escape the hand of God's *Justice*, because his *Reason* would not suffer him to *Believe* what God had *peremptorily declared for a Truth*? The *Story* is *remarkable*, as well as *apposite* to our present purpose.

When in the time of a great *Famine* that raged in *Samaria*, the Prophet *Elisha* had declared that the state of that City should be so far *Revers'd* within the short compass of a *single day*, as that *a measure of fine Flower should be sold for a Shekel, and two measures of Barley for a Shekel*, the Nobleman no doubt thought it a thing *not to be credited*, or in the *modern Phrase*, *could not Believe* it; he *could not Believe otherwise* than as the thing *appear'd* to his *Understanding*. "*Behold* (says he) *if the Lord would make windows in Heaven, might this thing be*? But was this *Plea* at all admitted in *favour* of his *Infidelity*? Was this *Pretence* at all allow'd of in *mitigation* of his *Punishment*? So far from it, that he answer'd for his *Infidelity*, how *Incredible* soever he had *thought* the thing to be, with

with *the loss of his Life*: as we have it related at large in the 7th chapter of the 2. B. of *Kings*. — And as to the Case of the unbelieving *Jews*, that will discover to us the wonders of God's *Justice* in making the *Blindness* and *Slowness* of *mens Hearts to Believe* from being their *Sin* to become their *Punishment*. “*Therefore they could not Believe* (says the Text in St. John) *because that E-saias said, He hath blinded their Eyes and harden'd their Heart, that they should not see with their Eyes, nor understand with their Heart, and be converted, and I should heal them.* But, I say, were that unhappy People at all the *safer* from *Punishment* upon that account? The *Fact* itself is so well known to be *otherwise*, that I conceive it altogether needless to insist upon it. Especially in *Such an Audience* as I am now addressing myself to.

To conclude therefore: And I know not how more *properly* to do it, than with declaring my real and undissembled *Charity* for the *Persons* of those unhappy men, whose *writings* and *opinions* have of late given but too much occasion for Discourses of this nature. *And God is my witness, that my Heart's Desire and Prayer to God for them is, that they might be saved*; and in order thereunto, *that he would give them Repentance to the acknowledgement of the Truth*.

God forbid that *we* should represent *them* to the world as *Devils Incarnate, the Devil's Instruments, a Set of men who provided they can make themselves necessary Here, care not who they damn Hereafter*; and then say, *we cannot Love them*; which is the usage our Author has thought fit to give

to *Priests in General*^a; (a *Few* only excepted for whom he pretends a more than ordinary Favour.) *This* is treatment, which, as *Christians*, we dare not give to the *worst* of men. And *should* we at any time be *Guilty* of it, it were surely *unreasonable* that our excellent *Religion* should in any measure bear the *Scandal* of it. We were in *that* case too justly liable to that severe *Rebuke* of our Blessed Master on no very different occasion; *ye know not what manner of Spirit ye are of.* What kind of Principles the *Apostates* from so Pure and unblameable a Faith, which even *Thinketh no evil*, act upon, whilst they openly indulge themselves in such *Unchristian Liberties*, I leave it to *themselves* to enquire; begging of *God* to *Forgive* them, thro' his powerful and prevailing *merits*, who even *died for them*, Praying for his Murderers.

Now unto him that is able to keep us from falling, and to present us faultless before the presence of his Glory with exceeding Joy;

To the only wise God, our Saviour, be Glory and Majesty, Dominion and Power, both now and ever. Amen.

^a Compare Christianity &c. p. 310. Par. 1. p. 352. l. 5. p. 386. Par. 1. with p. 287. ^b Luk 9. 55.



F I N I S.

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